

WASHINGTON POST
16 DECEMBER 1975

Bush Won't Bar '76 Spot

By Walter Pincus
Washington Post Staff Writer

Ambassador George Bush yesterday refused to rule out accepting the 1976 Republican vice presidential nomination if it were offered, but said he would not seek any office if he is confirmed as Central Intelligence Agency director.

In the first day of Senate Armed Services Committee hearings on his nomination to head the CIA, the former congressman and GOP national chairman said he would "leave politics behind the minute I take on the new job ... not seek any office ... take no part directly or indirectly in any partisan political activities."

Bush added that if a "group comes forward promoting me for Vice President when I am director of the CIA, I will instruct them to cease such activity."

But, if the vice presidential nomination were offered without his having sought it, Bush said, "I cannot in all honesty tell you that I would not accept."

Chairman John C. Stennis (D-Miss.) told Bush, "You have gone as far as any man should go in that declaration," and several other senators agreed.

But Stennis indicated he has some concern over Bush's vice presidential desires when he said: "At a minimum, it takes 12 months of intensive application to get on top of the (CIA director's) job." The Republican vice presidential nominee would be named within nine months of Bush's confirmation, should the Senate approve him.

Sen. Thomas McIntyre (D-N.H.) told Bush he thought the "key issue is your political background" and wondered "if it was appropriate for the President to appoint someone like you" at this time in the CIA's history.

"I do not want to see the agency director perceived by the public as a political person," McIntyre said.

In response, Bush said he should be judged on his own record. "I don't think this committee should knuckle under to appearances," he added.

Several senators asked Bush what he, as CIA director, would do in situations like those exposed during Watergate or in current congressional intelligence inquiries.

Bush said he opposes assassination of foreign leaders as "morally offensive." Assassinations are now prohibited by presidential directive, he said.

Asked what he would do if a President persisted in pressing such an operation, Bush said he would argue against it and if that failed, resign. In that situation, he added, he would report the incident to a congressional oversight committee.

Under questioning, Bush

would not say that he would oppose any other types of CIA clandestine operations overseas. "I can't tell you I would never support a coup d'etat," he said. He would "tread very very carefully on a government that was constitutionally elected," he added.

On a covert paramilitary operation such as that in Angola, Bush said, "I can see circumstances where it would be in the best interest of the U.S., its allies and neighboring countries." As for covert contributions to foreign political parties, he said, "I would never make a statement (that) it should never be done."

In a discussion with Sen. Gary Hart (D-Colo.), Bush said he would continue to keep congressional committees informed but said there are "things in intelligence that should be kept confidential" between the director and the President.

When Hart asked if Congress through some future intelligence oversight committee could be informed of a proposed covert operation—a reform now being discussed—Bush responded:

"I think it is an obligation of the President to determine covert activities after consultation with the National Security Council ... I don't think there has to be a group decision" with Congress.

Bush also called "ap-

palling" another CIA reform that has been proposed, that of placing covert operations in the State Department and leaving CIA with only intelligence-gathering and analysis functions. Such operations, Bush said, "should not be under policy-making bodies in peacetime."

Bush said the current congressional inquiries were not harming CIA, but several times he criticized "wanton disclosing of names of corporations associated with CIA ... and names of CIA agents" by former CIA employees.

To remedy that, he supported a change in the law that CIA director William E. Colby has proposed that would make it a crime to disclose information an individual learned while an employee of the CIA.

Asked what he would do if, hypothetically, President Ford sometime "down the campaign trail" asked him to get some dirt on Ronald Reagan, Bush responded, "I simply would say no," adding that "I couldn't conceive of the incumbent President doing that."

Two senators who have voiced strong reservations about Bush's political background, Sens. Henry M. Jackson (D-Wash.) and Frank Church (D-Idaho) are scheduled to take part in the Armed Services Committee hearings when they resume today.